

Alcohol consumption among students in Vietnam

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VALORIZA
TION

At the center of the valorization process is the challenging idea of the translation of knowledge into actual products and service. The main topics examined in this research thesis are alcohol use, drinking patterns, alcohol-related harms and the determinants of these harms, including the drinking context.

The main conclusions of this thesis can be summarized as follows:

- Alcohol consumption among students in Vietnam (a developing land) is lower than that of students in developed countries. The prevalence of alcohol consumption among students in Vietnam is 57.5% to 65.5% and that of alcohol-related harm is 12.5%.
- Students in Vietnam drink less frequently (less than once a month) and less heavily (two standard drinks per occasion) compared with students in developed countries.
- There is a considerable gender difference in alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems, but not in alcohol-related harms to others. Males drink more and have a higher prevalence of alcohol-related problems than females.
- Older students are more likely to consume alcohol than younger ones.
- Regional differences exist in drinking behavior and alcohol-related harms to others, i.e. students living in smaller cities in Vietnam drink more and experience more alcohol-related harms compared to those in larger cities.
- Drinking motives are the strongest predictors of alcohol use, rather than alcohol expectancies, which was also found in earlier studies performed in developed countries.
- The contextual aspects of the drinking situation appears to explain more of the variance in drinking than the individual aspects.

Since there is a large gap in the literature concerning alcohol consumption among students in developing countries in general - and in Vietnam in particular - the findings of this thesis provide useful information about the way in which students in Vietnam drink. In addition, in terms of scientific value, this work also contributes to knowledge by confirming the motivation theory that was developed many years ago based on studies conducted mainly in western countries. Although alcohol consumption is considerably influenced by culture, the findings emerging from these

studies conducted in Vietnam (which has a different drinking culture compared with those in developed countries) also confirm the motivation theory. Furthermore, our findings suggest a new research perspective for the future, i.e. to combine individual determinants (drinking motives being the strongest predictor of drinking) and drinking context in relation to multilevel motives.

Apart from the contribution to scientific knowledge, the present work also has more practical implications for public health policy in the field of alcohol. For example, since the Vietnam government is currently developing a more comprehensive alcohol policy, the present findings could be taken into account when preparing an alcohol policy for the youth in Vietnam.

Based on our findings we recommend that an alcohol policy should aim at reducing the availability of alcohol. Strategies to reduce alcohol availability that have been effectively applied in other countries include: regulation of the outlet density, regulation of the days/hours of sale in alcohol outlets, and making a license a prerequisite for selling alcohol, even in a tavern. Currently in Vietnam, a license is required only for selling spirits and not for selling home-brewed alcohol. However, as home-brew is a type of alcohol very commonly available in Vietnam, this is an important element in a policy aimed at reducing availability. Therefore, it is recommended that the Vietnam government make it mandatory to have a license to produce and sell home-brewed alcohol, as well as setting a minimum price unit for all alcoholic beverages - but especially for home-brewed alcohol.

In terms of more specific intervention programs, our studies suggest that interventions focusing on both the individual and contextual determinants should be developed and implemented. From the prevention point of view, it is important to know which specific factors need to be emphasized in any community intervention aimed at achieving a reduction in health hazards. At the individual level, the *Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test* (AUDIT) is a tool used to screen people at high risk of drinking problems. After using the AUDIT, drinking motives can be used to screen the motivations of drinkers. When a person at risk for heavy drinking is identified, some intervention strategy should be considered (e.g. individual counseling) to help persuade that person to drink less. Generally, for other students and individuals, the

health promotion program should raise awareness about the harmful effects of alcohol use for both drinkers and non-drinkers.

In terms of economic benefits, an intervention program based on the specific results of this thesis may help reduce alcohol problems, thereby contributing to a reduction in economic consequences. Harmful use of alcohol causes serious social consequences (including harms for others), all of which have an economic impact. These economic consequences include not only direct costs (i.e. the actual costs incurred when drinkers are involved in, for example, traffic accidents, fighting incidents, hospital treatment, etc.) but also indirect costs (such as loss to the economy due to a drinker's early death or incapacity to work). These economic consequences apply not only to drinkers but can also be (indirectly) incurred by people who do not drink. The economic consequences of harmful drinking are more deleterious from the social perspective than from the individual perspective.

In conclusion, this thesis provides data on drinking patterns, and the consequences of alcohol use and their determinants, among students in different regions of Vietnam. It is hoped that the knowledge gained from this project, together with findings from previous and future research, will not only provide additional evidence but may also help in the development of a national alcohol policy in Vietnam that will ultimately reduce the current economic burden associated with the harmful use of alcohol.